Agapius of Athens

(c. 460 – after 511)

BRIEFING

Agapios (Ancient Greek: Ἀγάπιος Agápios; * c. 460; † after 511) was a late antique Greek philosopher and philologist. He enjoyed high esteem as a versatile scholar. Nothing is known about his teachings, and none of his works have survived.

IDENTITY QUESTION

In older scholarly literature, as in the Suda , a distinction was made between two scholars named Agapios: a philosopher and philologist from Athens (“Agapios of Athens”) and a physician from Alexandria (“Agapios of Alexandria”). This distinction still has its proponents, but in more recent research, the view that they are the same person seems to be gaining ground.

According to a hypothesis by Paul Tannery , Agapios may be identical with a philosopher and mathematician named Aġānīs in a medieval Arabic commentary on Euclid's Elements . The author of this work, the Persian mathematician an-Nayrīzī , who worked in Baghdad in the late 9th century , quoted a now-lost commentary on Euclid attributed to the late antique scholar Simplicius , in which Aġānīs was mentioned several times.

LIFE

Agapios was probably born around 460 BC. If he is to be identified with the physician, he came from Alexandria and began his studies there. It is certain that he entered the Neoplatonic school of philosophy in Athens. This school was then still under the direction of the famous, already elderly philosopher Proclus . The contemporary Egyptian poet Christodorus referred to this; he praised Agapios in the lost poem "On the Listeners of the Great Proclus," of which only a single verse survives through quotation. In this verse, Christodorus described Agapios as the last (in terms of time), but the first (in terms of rank) among Proclus's students.

After Proclus' death in 485, Agapius attended the classes of his successor, Marinus . Under Emperor Zeno (474–491), he was arrested along with other philosophers as part of a state persecution of pagan thinkers, to which he belonged.

If the philosopher Agapios is identical with the physician of the same name, he later went to Constantinople and founded his own, very successful school there. The physician's expertise made him famous and provided him with a considerable income.

The last information about Agapius comes from the work De magistratibus by John Lydus . He reports that, at the age of twenty-one in 511, he attended Agapius's lessons on the teachings of Plato and Aristotle.

SOURCES

The main source is some surviving fragments from the Philosophical History of Damascius , the last head of the Neoplatonic school of philosophy in Athens, which is now largely lost and was written between 517 and 526. Damascius held Agapius in high esteem. He counted him among the three best contemporary literary critics he knew and praised his erudition, which had also earned him recognition in Alexandria and Constantinople.